Chapter XXI

The Ascent of Life

Let the path of the Word lead to the godheads, towards the Waters by the working of the Mind. . . .¹ O Flame, thou goest to the ocean of Heaven, towards the gods; thou makest to meet together the godheads of the planes, the waters that are in the realm of light above the sun and the waters that abide below.²

The Lord of Delight conquers the third status; he maintains and governs according to the Soul of universality; like a hawk, a kite he settles on the vessel and uplifts it, a finder of the Light he manifests the fourth status and cleaves to the ocean that is the billowing of those waters.³

Thrice Vishnu paced and set his step uplifted out of the primal dust; three steps he has paced, the Guardian, the Invincible, and from beyond he upholds their laws. Scan the workings of Vishnu and see from whence he has manifested their laws. That is his highest pace which is seen ever by the seers like an eye extended in heaven; that the illumined, the awakened kindle into a blaze, even Vishnu’s step supreme. . . .⁴

Rig Veda.

W E HAVE seen that as the divided mortal Mind, parent of limitation and ignorance and the dualities, is only a dark figure of the supermind, of the self-luminous divine Consciousness in its first dealings with the apparent negation of itself from which our cosmos commences, so also Life as it emerges in our material universe, an energy of the dividing

¹ X. 30. 1. ² III. 22. 3. ³ IX. 96. 18, 19. ⁴ I. 22. 17-21.
Mind subconscious, submerged, imprisoned in Matter, Life as the parent of death, hunger and incapacity, is only a dark figure of the divine superconscient Force whose highest terms are immortality, satisfied delight and omnipotence. This relation fixes the nature of that great cosmic processus of which we are a part; it determines the first, the middle and the ultimate terms of our evolution. The first terms of Life are division, a force-driven subconscious will, apparent not as will but as dumb urge of physical energy, and the impotence of an inert subjection to the mechanical forces that govern the interchange between the form and its environment. This inconscience and this blind but potent action of Energy are the type of the material universe as the physical scientist sees it and this his view of things extends and turns into the whole of basic existence; it is the consciousness of Matter and the accomplished type of material living. But there comes a new equipoise, there intervenes a new set of terms which increase in proportion as Life delivers itself out of this form and begins to evolve towards conscious Mind; for the middle terms of Life are death and mutual devouring, hunger and conscious desire, the sense of a limited room and capacity and the struggle to increase, to expand, to conquer and to possess. These three terms are the basis of that status of evolution which the Darwinian theory first made plain to human knowledge. For the phenomenon of death involves in itself a struggle to survive, since death is only the negative term in which Life hides from itself and tempts its own positive being to seek for immortality. The phenomenon of hunger and desire involves a struggle towards a status of satisfaction and security, since desire is only the stimulus by which Life tempts its own positive being to rise out of the negation of unfulfilled hunger towards the full possession of the delight of existence. The phenomenon of limited capacity involves a struggle towards expansion, mastery and possession, the possession of the self and the conquest of the environment, since limitation and defect are only the negation by which Life tempts its own positive being to seek for the perfection of which it is eternally capable. The struggle for life is not only a struggle to survive, it is also a struggle for possession and perfection,
since only by taking hold of the environment whether more or less, whether by self-adaptation to it or by adapting it to oneself either by accepting and conciliating it or by conquering and changing it, can survival be secured, and equally is it true that only a greater and greater perfection can assure a continuous permanence, a lasting survival. It is this truth that Darwinism sought to express in the formula of the survival of the fittest.

But as the scientific mind sought to extend to Life the mechanical principle proper to the existence and concealed mechanical consciousness in Matter, not seeing that a new principle has entered whose very reason of being is to subject to itself the mechanical, so the Darwinian formula was used to extend too largely the aggressive principle of Life, the vital selfishness of the individual, the instinct and process of self-preservation, self-assertion and aggressive living. For these two first states of Life contain in themselves the seeds of a new principle and another state which must increase in proportion as Mind evolves out of matter through the vital formula into its own law. And still more must all things change when as Life evolves upward towards Mind, so Mind evolves upward towards Supermind and Spirit. Precisely because the struggle for survival, the impulse towards permanence is contradicted by the law of death, the individual life is compelled, and used, to secure permanence rather for its species than for itself; but this it cannot do without the co-operation of others; and the principle of co-operation and mutual help, the desire of others, the desire of the wife, the child, the friend and helper, the associated group, the practice of association, of conscious joining and interchange are the seeds out of which flowers the principle of love. Let us grant that at first love may only be an extended selfishness and that this aspect of extended selfishness may persist and dominate, as it does still persist and dominate, in higher stages of the evolution: still as mind evolves and more and more finds itself, it comes by the experience of life and love and mutual help to perceive that the natural individual is a minor term of being and exists by the universal. Once this is discovered, as it is inevitably discovered by man the mental being, his destiny is determined; for
he has reached the point at which Mind can begin to open to the truth that there is something beyond itself; from that moment his evolution, however obscure and slow, towards that superior something, towards Spirit, towards supermind, towards supermanhood is inevitably predetermined.

Therefore Life is predestined by its own nature to a third status, a third set of terms of its self-expression. If we examine this ascent of Life we shall see that the last terms of its actual evolution, the terms of that which we have called its third status, must necessarily be in appearance the very contradiction and opposite but in fact the very fulfilment and transfiguration of its first conditions. Life starts with the extreme divisions and rigid forms of Matter, and of this rigid division the atom, which is the basis of all material form, is the very type. The atom stands apart from all others even in its union with them, rejects death and dissolution under any ordinary force and is the physical type of the separate ego defining its existence against the principle of fusion in Nature. But unity is as strong a principle in Nature as division; it is indeed the master principle of which division is only a subordinate term, and to the principle of unity every divided form must therefore subordinate itself in one fashion or another by mechanical necessity, by compulsion, by assent or inducement. Therefore, if Nature for her own ends, in order principally to have a firm basis for her combinations and a fixed seed of forms, allows the atom ordinarily to resist the process of fusion by dissolution, she compels it to subserve the process of fusion by aggregation; the atom, as it is the first aggregate, is also the first basis of aggregate unities.

When Life reaches its second status, that which we recognise as vitality, the contrary phenomenon takes the lead and the physical basis of the vital ego is obliged to consent to dissolution. Its constituents are broken up so that the elements of one life can be used to enter into the elemental formation of other lives. The extent to which this law reigns in Nature has not yet been fully recognised and indeed cannot be until we have a science of mental life and spiritual existence as sound as our present science of physical life and the existence of Matter. Still we can
see broadly that not only the elements of our physical body, but those of our subtler vital being, our life-energy, our desire-energy, our powers, strivings, passions enter both during our life and after our death into the life-existence of others. An ancient occult knowledge tells us that we have a vital frame as well as a physical and this too is after death dissolved and lends itself to the constitution of other vital bodies; our life energies while we live are continually mixing with the energies of other beings. A similar law governs the mutual relations of our mental life with the mental life of other thinking creatures. There is a constant dissolution and dispersion and a reconstruction effected by the shock of mind upon mind with a constant interchange and fusion of elements. Interchange, intermixture and fusion of being with being, is the very process of life, a law of its existence.

We have then two principles in Life, the necessity or the will of the separate ego to survive in its distinctness and guard its identity and the compulsion imposed upon it by Nature to fuse itself with others. In the physical world she lays much stress on the former impulse; for she needs to create stable separate forms, since it is her first and really her most difficult problem to create and maintain any such thing as a separative survival of individuality and a stable form for it in the incessant flux and motion of Energy and in the unity of the infinite. In the atomic life therefore the individual form persists as the basis and secures by its aggregation with others the more or less prolonged existence of aggregate forms which shall be the basis of vital and mental individualisations. But as soon as Nature has secured a sufficient firmness in this respect for the safe conduct of her ulterior operations, she reverses the process; the individual form perishes and the aggregate life profits by the elements of the form that is thus dissolved. This, however, cannot be the last stage; that can only be reached when the two principles are harmonised, when the individual is able to persist in the consciousness of his individuality and yet fuse himself with others without disturbance of preservative equilibrium and interruption of survival.

The terms of the problem presuppose the full emergence of Mind; for in vitality without conscious mind there can be no
equation, but only a temporary unstable equilibrium ending in
the death of the body, the dissolution of the individual and the
dispersal of its elements into the universality. The nature of phys-
ical Life forbids the idea of an individual form possessing the
same inherent power of persistence and therefore of continued
individual existence as the atoms of which it is composed. Only
a mental being, supported by the psychic nodus within which
expresses or begins to express the secret soul, can hope to persist
by his power of linking on the past to the future in a stream of
continuity which the breaking of the form may break in the
physical memory but need not destroy in the mental being itself
and which may even by an eventual development bridge over
the gap of physical memory created by death and birth of the
body. Even as it is, even in the present imperfect development
of embodied mind, the mental being is conscious in the mass
of a past and a future extending beyond the life of the body;
he becomes aware of an individual past, of individual lives that
have created his and of which he is a development and modified
reproduction and of future individual lives which his is creating
out of itself; he is conscious also of an aggregate life past and
future through which his own continuity runs as one of its fibres.
This which is evident to physical Science in the terms of heredity,
becomes otherwise evident to the developing soul behind the
mental being in the terms of persistent personality. The mental
being expressive of this soul-consciousness is therefore the nodus
of the persistent individual and the persistent aggregate life; in
him their union and harmony become possible.

Association with love as its secret principle and its emergent
summit is the type, the power of this new relation and therefore
the governing principle of the development into the third status
of life. The conscious preservation of individuality along with
the consciously accepted necessity and desire of interchange,
self-giving and fusion with other individuals, is necessary for the
working of the principle of love; for if either is abolished, the
working of love ceases, whatever may take its place. Fulfilment
of love by entire self-immolation, even with an illusion of self-
annihilation, is indeed an idea and an impulse in the mental
being, but it points to a development beyond this third status of Life. This third status is a condition in which we rise progressively beyond the struggle for life by mutual devouring and the survival of the fittest by that struggle; for there is more and more a survival by mutual help and a self-perfectioning by mutual adaptation, interchange and fusion. Life is a self-affirmation of being, even a development and survival of ego, but of a being that has need of other beings, an ego that seeks to meet and include other egos and to be included in their life. The individuals and the aggregates who develop most the law of association and the law of love, of common help, kindliness, affection, comradeship, unity, who harmonise most successfully survival and mutual self-giving, the aggregate increasing the individual and the individual the aggregate, as well as individual increasing individual and aggregate aggregate by mutual interchange, will be the fittest for survival in this tertiary status of the evolution.

This development is significant of the increasing predominance of Mind which progressively imposes its own law more and more upon the material existence. For Mind by its greater subtlety does not need to devour in order to assimilate, possess and grow; rather the more it gives, the more it receives and grows; and the more it fuses itself into others, the more it fuses others into itself and increases the scope of its being. Physical life exhausts itself by too much giving and ruins itself by too much devouring; but though Mind in proportion as it leans on the law of Matter suffers the same limitation, yet, on the other hand, in proportion as it grows into its own law it tends to overcome this limitation, and in proportion as it overcomes the material limitation giving and receiving become one. For in its upward ascent it grows towards the rule of conscious unity in differentiation which is the divine law of the manifest Sachchidananda.

What is spoken of here is mind as it acts directly in life, in the vital being, through the heart. Love—the relative principle, not its absolute—is a principle of life, not of mind, but it can possess itself and move towards permanence only when taken up by the mind into its own light. What is called love in the body and the vital parts is mostly a form of hunger without permanence.
The second term of the original status of life is subconscious will which in the secondary status becomes hunger and conscious desire, — hunger and desire, the first seed of conscious mind. The growth into the third status of life by the principle of association, the growth of love, does not abolish the law of desire, but rather transforms and fulfils it. Love is in its nature the desire to give oneself to others and to receive others in exchange; it is a commerce between being and being. Physical life does not desire to give itself, it desires only to receive. It is true that it is compelled to give itself, for the life which only receives and does not give must become barren, wither and perish, — if indeed such life in its entirety is possible at all here or in any world; but it is compelled, not willing, it obeys the subconscious impulse of Nature rather than consciously shares in it. Even when love intervenes, the self-giving at first still preserves to a large extent the mechanical character of the subconscious will in the atom. Love itself at first obeys the law of hunger and enjoys the receiving and the exacting from others rather than the giving and surrendering to others which it admits chiefly as a necessary price for the thing that it desires. But here it has not yet attained to its true nature; its true law is to establish an equal commerce in which the joy of giving is equal to the joy of receiving and tends in the end to become even greater; but that is when it is shooting beyond itself under the pressure of the psychic flame to attain to the fulfilment of utter unity and has therefore to realise that which seemed to it not-self as an even greater and dearer self than its own individuality. In its life-origin, the law of love is the impulse to realise and fulfil oneself in others and by others, to be enriched by enriching, to possess and be possessed because without being possessed one does not possess oneself utterly.

The inert incapacity of atomic existence to possess itself, the subjection of the material individual to the not-self, belongs to the first status of life. The consciousness of limitation and the struggle to possess, to master both self and the not-self is the type of the secondary status. Here, too, the development to the third status brings a transformation of the original terms into a fulfilment and a harmony which repeat the terms while seeming
to contradict them. There comes about through association and through love a recognition of the not-self as a greater self and therefore a consciously accepted submission to its law and need which fulfils the increasing impulse of aggregate life to absorb the individual; and there is a possession again by the individual of the life of others as his own and of all that it has to give him as his own which fulfils the opposite impulse of individual possession. Nor can this relation of mutuality between the individual and the world he lives in be expressed or complete or secure unless the same relation is established between individual and individual and between aggregate and aggregate. All the difficult effort of man towards the harmonisation of self-affirmation and freedom, by which he possesses himself, with association and love, fraternity, comradeship, in which he gives himself to others, his ideals of harmonious equilibrium, justice, mutuality, equality by which he creates a balance of the two opposites, are really an attempt inevitably predetermined in its lines to solve the original problem of Nature, the very problem of Life itself, by the resolution of the conflict between the two opposites which present themselves in the very foundations of Life in Matter. The resolution is attempted by the higher principle of Mind which alone can find the road towards the harmony intended, even though the harmony itself can only be found in a Power still beyond us.

For, if the data with which we have started are correct, the end of the road, the goal itself can only be reached by Mind passing beyond itself into that which is beyond Mind, since of That the Mind is only an inferior term and an instrument first for descent into form and individuality and secondly for reascension into that reality which the form embodies and the individuality represents. Therefore the perfect solution of the problem of Life is not likely to be realised by association, interchange and accommodations of love alone or through the law of the mind and the heart alone. It must come by a fourth status of life in which the eternal unity of the many is realised through the spirit and the conscious foundation of all the operations of life is laid no longer in the divisions of body, nor in the passions and hungers
of the vitality, nor in the groupings and the imperfect harmonies of the mind, nor in a combination of all these, but in the unity and freedom of the Spirit.